



# MTCC AmeriCorps\*VISTA Quarterly

VOLUME II, ISSUE II

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## SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

9/11 Feature Story

Member Interviews

Alumni Corner

Interactive Content

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More Member Interviews!

By: Rabi Vandergon, MTCC VISTA Leader

Winter is approaching! The autumn leaves are falling along with fresh snow on the hills. VISTA Program manager, Brian Christianson, and I are nearly complete with our site visits to our VISTAs around the state. Our members are showing their vibrant colors through their work. We've received a few motivating reports of news stories featuring MTCC VISTA members (see page 8). In addition, service projects for 9/11 National Day of Service and Remembrance were a great success! Meeting with our members face to face is truly an uplift when seeing and hearing the passion that VISTAs have toward their work at their service sites and beyond. Turning the page will reveal a small example of this passion. Thanks for reading!



VISTAs working hard to raise hoop houses for 9-11 National Day of Service and Remembrance at the National Center for Appropriate Technology in Butte.

## Service By the Numbers

During the reporting period of July 2011 to October 2011, 30 MTCC AmeriCorps\*VISTAs and host organizations:

- Raised **\$40,703** in cash funding and in-kind donations valued at **\$5,483**.
- Offered services to **2,282** new clients.
- A total of **403 volunteers** recruited to serve in programs, providing **1,413 hours** of service work.
- Of those 403 volunteers, **297 were students**.
- **815** disadvantaged children and youth were served.
- **354** individuals were mentored through VISTA programs.



**Ashley Makowski**  
**Montana Tech Service-Learning**  
**Butte, MT**

**What is your background that led you to serve a year as an AmeriCorps\*VISTA?**

My desire to do service began while I was growing up in Boulder. My family really loved the history and culture in Butte, and I grew up with stories about people always willing to help each other out in times of need, regardless of how tough times were.

I became familiar with AmeriCorps during college. I was friends with the Campus Corps team leader at Montana Western. I was able to help them with their service projects, and when I graduated, I was encouraged to join AmeriCorps. I really wanted to spend time serving in Butte, doing my part to keep up that tradition of helping others I was so fond of while growing up, so AmeriCorps VISTA was the perfect fit.

**Describe a typical workday at your host site.**

It's difficult to nail down a "typical" day. Some days, I would spend a lot of time trying to get in touch with community organizations to form partnerships either for a service-learning course or for a service project I was organizing. Other days, I would spend time researching service-learning and looking for and applying for grants/project proposals. Right now, I am gathering data and project proposals we've done in the past. I'm putting it all together in a binder so the information a staff member or coordinator would need in the future for project proposals is all in one place.

**What are your motivating factors that justify this type of work?**

When I began my service, I had very limited knowledge of what service-learning is. Through research, meeting with other campuses, and seeing what it's doing on the Montana Tech campus, I've really become a firm believer in the value of service-learning. I think there are a lot of ways students can impact the communities they are getting their education from, and I think there is a desire among students to do so. This type of work is building bridges between the students and the community so they can meet both of their needs through student education.

**What are your plans after VISTA?**

After VISTA, I think I will go to Washington state. I would like to eventually get my Master's in Rhetoric and Composition and a Ph.D. in some form of literature and writing.



**Jazmine Raymond**  
**Clay Studio of Missoula**  
**Missoula, MT**

**What is your background that led you to serve a year as an AmeriCorps\*VISTA?**

I was a ceramics student in college, and upon moving back home to Missoula post graduation, I searched for a way to continue my involvement in the medium. I found it at The Clay Studio of Missoula. I became an intern and traded work for use of the communal studio space. This arrangement continued for two years. During my second year, the studio hired its first VISTA. He did great things for the organization, and when his term was ending, I agreed to apply to replace him. I was sick of my sales job situation and wanted to work for something I believed in and loved full time. I wanted a dynamic job that involved the use of my brainpower. This seemed like an ideal opportunity, so I took it, and was hired.

**Describe a typical workday at your host site.**

A typical day at my host site involves sharing the office with the Executive Director, Jill. I have the computer in front of the window and she has the one in front of the door. Most of the time I am at my computer. I may be writing and answering emails, coordinating classes, volunteers, interns, or working on outreach materials in some manner or another. If it's a really good day, I get to work on event planning or make visits, which are my favorite things.

**What are your motivating factors that justify this type of work?**

My big job here at the studio is the Building Community Through Clay Project. The goal of this program is to provide expanded arts opportunities to Missoula youth. I cannot say enough how important this cause is! My motivation is my own experience growing up. Really, I don't know where I would be if I wasn't given the opportunities I had as a child. I grew up poor here in Missoula, and attended Lowell and Target Range Elementary Schools. At Lowell, there was one art teacher that visited the school occasionally to teach a class. I still have my first ceramic project I ever made with Mrs. Pots in kindergarten. It's an angel-fish. At Target Range, there was a single art teacher for the entire school, and classes had to rotate through to take lessons from him. Our family couldn't afford to give my sisters or me private lessons in anything. My public school education was what I got. I was lucky, though, like I said. My mother is an artist and encouraged and praised my artistic pursuits, and I spent lots of time on my own reading and creating. Art was the thing that I was good at. It empowered me in an environment where I was not given much to take pride in. I understand what art affords those who practice it. It's an expression of autonomy and individuality. It encourages creative thinking, which is useful and applicable everywhere in your life. It is freeing, as there is no 'right' or 'wrong' when it comes to artistic expression. Basically, giving kids the opportunity to create gives them important tools for their whole lives. I value what my arts education has given me, and I believe strongly in sharing it with others.

**What are your plans after VISTA?**

I will be sustainably renovating a vintage school bus, making and sharing art, and hopefully traveling and facilitating creative community workshops and events. I might do an artist residency program or go to grad school sometime soon-ish.





**Emma Reid**  
**Greater Gallatin United Way - KidsLINK**  
**Bozeman, MT**

**What is your background that led you to serve a year as an AmeriCorps\*VISTA?**

When I graduated from the University of Michigan, I decided to become an AmeriCorps\*VISTA because I wanted to apply my skills in a meaningful way. While in Michigan, I volunteered with a summer camp for diversely-abled students and became committed to out-of-school learning, and to closing the gap between children of lower socioeconomic status and their wealthier peers. Although I did not originally plan to move to Montana, I decided on Bozeman because I found a position at Greater Gallatin United Way kidsLINK that allows me to work on the issues that are most important to me. Happily, I have survived mountain driving and Montana winters so far, despite having been initially apprehensive about braving these dangers, even for such rewarding work.



**Describe a typical workday at your host site.**

Although the responsibilities of my position vary from day to day, I have worked to increase S.T.E.M. activities at all 23 of Greater Gallatin United Way kidsLINK's afterschool programs; helped facilitate a partnership with Montana State University allowing pre-service teachers to provide reading, technology, and general academic enrichment; helped write grants to sustain the programs; and am currently compiling data for a workplace campaign to promote parent involvement in education.

**What are your motivating factors that justify this type of work?**

Making sure that all individuals have their basic needs met and have an equal opportunity to succeed in life is not just a nice dream, it's an accomplishable goal. I believe that improving education for all children is an essential step in ending poverty and I am grateful that my VISTA position has allowed me to work on these issues.

**What are your plans after VISTA?**

After VISTA, I plan to get my Master's in Education/Education Policy, teach at the secondary level, conduct action research, and advocate for Education reform.

**Eric Walliman**  
**Student Advocates for Valuing the Environment (SAVE)**  
**Helena, MT**

**What is your background that led you to serve a year as an AmeriCorps\*VISTA?**

After I finished college I just wanted to do something that allowed me to give back, to say thanks for all of the benefits that I've been able to enjoy that others might not have had. I did a lot of volunteer work in the community where I was living. I helped maintain the local historical societies farmland. When I wasn't working I wanted to do something that was similar to that, only on a larger scale. Joining AmeriCorps has allowed me the chance to really have a huge impact on the community where I'm serving. Now I get to help encourage others to support recycling and all of its benefits.

Additionally, AmeriCorps provides you with opportunities that can shift the direction of your life. Before I started my year of service I wasn't entirely sure what I wanted to do as a career and now I have all of these doors opening due to my experience. I have all these new opportunities that I had never considered beforehand, I feel like I can do anything I want at this point.

**Describe a typical workday at your host site.**

I'm lucky, I have a lot of variety in my day-to-day service. Some days I work on general office business or grant writing, anything that will build infrastructure for the long-term benefit of the organization. I also spend my time out of the office working with the local high schools and colleges talking about recent environmental and conservation developments. S.A.V.E. is actively engaged in the local community and provides recycling for a variety of community events. We are constantly working on creating guides for events, setting up bins, and collecting the recyclables that the event produces. I never know what I'll be working on until I get to the office so there's always that element of surprise that keeps things fresh.

**What are your motivating factors that justify this type of work?**

I'd have to say that my motivating factors are selfish reasons. At the end of the day this type of work makes you feel good about yourself and what you're doing. It's not quite the same working most other jobs where you're just in it for the paycheck. I get to feel good about the work I do and it's positively impacting the community that I'm serving in.

**What are your plans after VISTA?**

It looks like I'm going to stick with AmeriCorps for another year. I'm looking into another VISTA position or I might try something altogether different like the Conservation Corps. I think the AmeriCorps program is great! It provides me the opportunity to do something worthwhile and it allows me to see parts of the country and meet people that I might not have had the opportunity to without it.



**Caroline Wallace**  
**Alternative Energy Resources Association**  
**Helena, MT**

**What is your background that led you to serve a year as an AmeriCorps\*VISTA?**

I have a background in Landscape Architecture. While studying, I worked for a school-run non-profit organization called the Community Design Assistance Center. CDAC provides design and charette services to small communities, schools, and other organizations that can't afford professional design services. It was through this and a desire to do more community-building work that prompted me to pursue AmeriCorps. I also wanted to gain more experience with an environmentally-focused non-profit.

**Describe a typical workday at your host site.**

A typical workday consists of answering inquiries and connecting people with the information or resources they are looking for, working on communications and outreach for my organization, planning and promoting events including conferences, fundraisers, service projects, and educational opportunities.

**What are your motivating factors that justify this type of work?**

I feel that I should take advantage of being young and energetic to do the type of work that requires a lot of personal commitment and hard work, with little monetary gain but plenty of personal satisfaction. I have been given so much from someone who devoted their entire life to advocating for those who don't have a voice- AmeriCorps is a way of honoring their life and work.

**What are your plans after VISTA?**

My plans after VISTA are to stay in Helena and find work, with part-time hours at my current organization being a possibility.





**Laura Wilburn  
Hopa Mountain  
Bozeman, MT**

**What is your background that led you to serve a year as an AmeriCorps\*VISTA?**

Originally, I thought I wanted to do Peace Corps. After months of trying to explain to them that I had never been vaccinated for polio (because it's a dead disease in this country) and dealing with my parent's panic attacks, I decided AmeriCorps sounded like a nice alternative.

I have always believed very strongly in the spirit of volunteerism. I think there is a give and take in the world – we are all given certain talents and experiences, and in return I believe in using those talents and experiences to give back in whatever way I can. In doing so, I learn a lot and gain even more experiences that I can then use going forward.

**Describe a typical workday at your host site.**

A typical work day always starts with coffee. Sometimes my office runs out of coffee because somehow no one was paying attention, and that usually triggers widespread panic and a trip to the nearest coffee shop. Once coffee is taken care of, I usually have several phone calls to make arranging service projects for the teens in Hopa Mountain's youth project. Every Monday and Friday I call the teens to remind them about the weekly meetings the following days. This takes a surprisingly long time – they usually have many life updates to give me. I'll look over various grant guidelines trying to find relevant ones, and I may even write one of them. Most days involve running some errands to buy supplies and snacks for the teen meetings, or to beg stores for donations, or to meet with other organizations in town that do work with youth. I spend a lot of time researching and brainstorming ideas for projects, or looking at next steps for existing projects, or reading up on the latest research on youth development. By afternoon, I've inevitably gone on one weird news story tangent and one conversation tangent with my office mate. There's also quite a bit of record keeping and paper work for the program. If the youth program is trucking along just fine and I don't have much to do with that, I'll work on developing our Salesforce database for donor management or helping Bonnie with one of Hopa's community workshops.

**What are your motivating factors that justify this type of work?**

I could write a whole essay on this, but gratitude and the relationships I've developed with the teens are the two factors that really jump out for me. Also a very strong conviction that youth hold a lot of promise for breaking out of the cycle of poverty in ways that adults can't always access.

**What are your plans after VISTA?**

If all goes well I suppose I'll find a job, probably back east. Something involving youth, education, environmental policy, or all three sounds appealing. If not, I guess I'll hitchhike around for a while and then work as a bicycle mechanic. Mainly, I plan on keeping alert for cool opportunities, whatever those may be.



# MTCC AmeriCorps\*VISTA Interactive

## MTCC VISTA Alumni Corner

Stay Connected! Please give us your updated contact information by completing this [online form](#).

Also be sure to check out the [VISTA Campus alumni page](#).

Begin networking with other [AmeriCorps Alums](#).

### Interactive Links:

[Map](#) of currently serving MTCC VISTA placements in Montana.

Read news articles featuring MTCC VISTAs [Lea Howe](#), [Lindsay Howard](#) and [Amanda Opitz](#).

Community Building Institute [resources](#).

New Montana AmeriCorps Connection [statewide forum](#) for housing requests, local AmeriCorps discounts and more!

[MTCC AmeriCorps\\*VISTA Website](#)

*"It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no man [or woman] can sincerely try to help another without helping himself [or herself]."*

Ralph Waldo Emerson



A volunteer staffing the WORD Toiletry Drive Table for 9/11 National Day of Service and Remembrance. The drive ended up bringing in over 700 items, more than \$2500 worth of goods, with the help of the UM Office for Civic Engagement.



Montana | Campus Compact



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## MTCC AmeriCorps\*VISTA Project

The Montana Campus Compact (MTCC) is a 20-campus network of colleges and universities committed to the public purposes of higher education. MTCC campuses build long-term partnerships with local non-profits, schools, and faith-based organizations. Student volunteers, service-learners, Campus Corps AmeriCorps members, faculty, and staff volunteer their time to address critical needs across Montana. MTCC VISTAs help to facilitate much of the community planning work and start many of the campus-community partnerships in Montana.

MTCC AMERICORPS\*VISTA QUARTERLY